DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 262 JC 830 282

AUTHOR Adams, Frank G.
TITLE Research in Accrediting Efforts (Project REA). An Assessment of Awarding Academic Credit for Employment Training Activities in Illinois. Summary Report.
INSTITUTION Lake County Coll., Grayslake, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Illinois State Dept. of Commerce and Community Affairs, Springfield.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 21p.; For related documents, see ED 226 811-812, ED 227 901-902, ED 227 914, and ED 228 400.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Competency Based Education; *Educational Certificates; *Employer Attitudes; *Employment Programs; *Job Training; State Surveys; Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Comprehensive Employment and Training Act; *Illinois

ABSTRACT

The report describes and provides selected findings from Project REA (Research in Accrediting Efforts), which studied various aspects of manpower training under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) in Illinois. The first section outlines the goals of Project REA in identifying avenues for job training, methods for granting academic credit for training, and employer attitudes towards various credentials. Next, findings from case studies of CETA programs are highlighted with respect to the credentialling of employment training programs. This section reveals the failure of most programs to meet high school or college standards for academic credit, difficulties in obtaining records of training, and problems in defining what particular credentials mean. In addition, solutions are offered for some of these problems, and an argument is presented for applying some form of credit to all job-training programs. After describing the REA Operators Manual, which was developed to promote more effective application of credentials to employment training programs, the report presents the results of a study of alternative schools for high school dropouts. The next sections present information on a directory of training and educational programs offered by CETA sponsors, and on competency-based education programs. Finally, the results of a survey of employer attitudes toward credentials and training are summarized. (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED230262

Summary Report

Research in Accrediting Efforts (Project REA)

An Assessment of Awarding Academic Credit for Employment Training Activities in Illinois

Frank G. Adams, Dean of Open Campus, Project Director

This project is conducted with funds provided by the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, as amended, and does not necessarily represent, in whole or in part, the viewpoint of the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs.

The College of Lake County affirms and adheres to a policy of equal opportunity in all aspects of education and employment.

College of Lake County
19351 West Washington Street
Grayslake, Illinois 60030

JC 830 282

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
F. G. Adams
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

INTRODUCTION

This summary report is a brief description of a project that studied various aspects of manpower training under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act.

The findings, which were reported to the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs in six detailed documents and a directory of manpower training sites in Illinois, are capsulized in this report.

The findings are not only applicable to CETA, but to the new Job Training Partnership Act of 1982.

Frank Adams

Project REA was a major state-wide effort to identify avenues for training, how training is credentialed, and employer attitudes toward various credentials.

The research conducted by the College of Lake County produced several documents which are highlighted in this summary.

One of the most significant outcomes of the research cannot be quantified in any of the studies. The outcome seems to be more perceptional than those which came out of the discussions with the state advisory council for the project. These perceptions are worth consideration as Illinois moves from the Comprehensive Employment Training Program to the Job Training Partnership Act Programs.

In brief, these perceptions are:

1. Training should have a perpetual record of student performance.
2. Training should relate to specific competencies.
3. Training should be driven by the specific needs of local industry.
4. Training should be short-term and intensive skill-developing.

Edmund Gleazer, a noted technical and community college expert, recently wrote that schools and colleges have become the "self-contained enclaves of educators." Given the training needs of unemployed, underemployed and dislocated workers in the state, the REA staff, Advisory Board, and the various consultants working with the REA staff believe the products pro-

duced from this study may help bring educators and trainers closer to an understanding that in order to solve the economic problems of the state, all agencies involved in training will need to re-evaluate what they are doing in the context of new realities.

DISCOVERING WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS IN THE AREA OF CREDENTIALS FOR EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

The problems surrounding the issue of offering credit for employment and training program activities are numerous. In a series of case studies centered in CETA Prime Sponsors and Program Agents districts in Illinois, the following common concerns were identified:

1. Most of the training programs offered do not meet either high school or college standards for academic credit.

2. When training is offered by agencies other than secondary schools, area vocational centers, and colleges, it is difficult to obtain a record of the training after the course is completed. Within a very few years, records of the training are often unavailable because the agency or program that provided the training no longer exists.

3. What do various credentials mean? How can a prospective employer or the admissions department of a training agency or college know what credit value to place on "training" offered by agencies other than accredited schools and colleges?

4. Many agencies that are excellent training deliverers do not know anything about credentials or creating a perpetual student record of training.

For every problem that was identified in the case studies, there were also solutions. At least one agency visited had found a way to deal with each problem. To begin with, it was evident that consideration needed to be given to other than just academic credit as an option for employment and training programs. Both high schools and community colleges frequently use some form of nonacademic credit. This can be used to offer credentials for courses that do not meet the content standards or time standards established for academic credit. The level of standardization on nonacademic credit is almost nonexistent and, therefore, there is no obvious way to know what "career credit" or "elective credit" means; however, at most schools which offer these options, any transcript listing those credits will also contain that school's definition of the credential.

In addition to academic and nonacademic credit, there are a variety of other credentials (such as certificates of completion or attendance) that can be offered by any training organization. One form of credential that was being studied in the state of Illinois is the competency-based certificate. In this instance, the certificate lists the specific skills or knowledge covered in the training and the level of competence each trainee has attained. This credential form was the subject of one of the in-depth reports compiled by Project REA and seems to be one that is desired by employers.

The problem of record-keeping and availability of the records mainly occurs with training offered by community-based organiza-

tions and some proprietary schools. These organizations do not have either the assurance of continued existence or the transcripting mechanism established to deal with these problems. Public and private schools and colleges recognized by the state, on the other hand, have little problem with record-keeping. For decades they have maintained complete transcripting services for their students. Some private schools and colleges also have no guarantee of continuing existence, but they do have the state education offices available to maintain records if they default. Because they tend to continue their existence in spite of the vagaries of the economy and the society, a record of the credit earned in their programs will always be available. Even if an individual high school closes, the district will remain and the transcripts can be obtained. If a state-recognized private school closes, the state is available to perpetuate the transcript.

The general solution to the record-keeping problem may well lie in a cooperative agreement between agencies which have a transcripting process and those that do not. Some school administrators were concerned that they would end up being inundated with requests if they agreed to maintain records and issue transcripts for training and education other than their own; however, the experience of the Illinois community colleges that have broken this services has been that requests have not been overwhelming, and a reasonable fee charged to the agency or individual being transcripted covers the cost of the service.

An ongoing theme throughout Project REA was the need to provide information about credentials for training to those involved in working with the unemployed. Problem four listed above was merely one more verification of this issue. The awareness level of many of those actually involved in providing training was low. For others, the problem centered around a failure to perceive a credential, such as credit, as an important aspect of training. Project REA developed an operators manual and conducted a series of workshops to train service providers in the use of the manual in response to this need. Both the importance of credentials and the methods of establishing them were covered in this way.

The case studies pointed up very successful programs, as well as problems. It was clear that some form of credential could be applied to any of the training programs available through CETA, or other job-training programs. The overwhelming opinion of both CETA personnel and the educators and trainers interviewed in the case studies was that a credential was a valuable adjunct to any training for two reasons:

1. A credential provides verification that the student has been trained. Some credentials actually give evidence of the degree of competence that has been achieved.

2. A credential has positive impact on the students, both in terms of their self-concept and in their consideration of the importance of training.

The case studies indicated some definite areas for further study. In addition to the operator's manual, Project REA conducted several in-depth studies look further into the issues and institutions surrounding the credentials for training.

THE OPERATORS MANUAL: A TOOL TO PROMOTE MORE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF CREDENTIALS TO EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

Perhaps the most long-lasting impact of Project REA will be the Operators Manual. It was designed to be a useful tool for employment and training program personnel, educators, and trainers in the future. Because employment and training programs change, the manual was developed as a generic process for credentialing. Educational and training institutions change more slowly, so the manual is expected to reflect accurately the mechanism and procedures for establishing credentials used by these institutions for several years. The manual is divided into sections, allowing for the great differences among the various institutions involved in employment training programs. The manual gives direction for establishing credentials for programs in secondary schools, community colleges, area vocations centers, adult education organizations, proprietary schools, and community-based organizations.

Pilot workshops were held across the state to introduce the manual to CETA staff, educators, and appropriate organization personnel. Those who attended the pilot sessions viewed the manual as a useful tool for organizations providing employment training programs. The need for wide distribution of the manuals and extensive training opportunities was evident from their comments. The agencies that can benefit from the manual need first to know that it exists, and

second, to understand how to use it. In the coming year, when the responsibility for employment and training programs shifts to the Private Industry Councils, the need for effective tools to maintain the valuable knowledge, programs and mechanism that have been established by previous employment training agencies will be even more evident. The Project REA Operators Manual is one of those tools. Appropriate distribution of this manual, and effective training sessions in its use, may save new program managers valuable time and provide them with a workable solution to one of the problems in establishing effective employment training.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS: ANOTHER APPROACH TO YOUTH

Drop-out youth are frequently a serious unemployment problem. Without high school completion, they are handicapped in their efforts to find employment; and, yet, when asked, they will tell us that traditional high schools do not offer them anything they consider real. The actual answer to why they drop out is more complicated. They have problems adhering to the behavioral norms expected in the traditional high school and, frequently, they are not motivated to work or succeed by the system of rewards ordinarily used in secondary schools. Regardless of the reason for dropping out, the one common denominator for these students is that their needs were not met by the high school. Project REA conducted an in-depth study to look at the alternative schools that have been developed to meet the needs of dropouts. Some of these schools are part of the public school system; some are private educational institutions; and some are programs developed by community-based organizations. Often they are operated in storefronts and faced with a struggle to qualify for state accreditation. Some of the schools offer a diploma of their own, while others have articulated agreements with the traditional high school in the area to award the diploma when the alternative school program is complete. Some offer the student the opportunity to finish high school in the alternative program, others serve as a bridge between dropout status and the traditional high school. They help the student make the transition to the program and expecta-

tions of the traditional school to which they must return if they are to receive a diploma.

The one common denominator is that the alternative school establishes a program paced to meet the dropouts' needs, with content designed to fit their reality, and a set of behavioral expectations that recognizes the unique issues and problems these particular students embody.

Their success rate varies but is, nevertheless, impressive. Their curriculum is unorthodox; however, it involves reading, writing, math, and history, as well as vocational skills and work readiness. The bottom line may well be that the alternative school offers an opportunity for the youth who has dropped out to reconnect with his/her society in a way that no traditional school can offer.

THE DIRECTORY

Another document that will be useful for the next year or two is the Directory. The Directory compiles training and education programs currently involved in Comprehensive Employment and Training Act programs.

The Directory, although not originally planned, became a necessary tool for the project staff to reach trainers statewide. The Directory is comprehensive, but may yet have missed trainers that could not be identified, or who did not respond at the time of the printing of the Directory.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION: A MODEL FOR VIABLE EMPLOYMENT SKILLS TRAINING

The case studies illustrated the effective use of the competency-based certificate as a credential for employment training. Properly used, this certificate gives employers a clear description of the knowledge and skills the training has covered, and the level of attainment the applicant has achieved within each competency area. As a result, employers can have specific knowledge about what to expect from each employee, and training organizations have an accurate indication of where to place participants in further training programs. The enthusiasm of some educators and CETA staff for the competency-based certificate led to an interest in competency-based education. The study conducted by Project REA led to a report describing a model for Competency-Based Education (CBE) and reporting on where it is being used in Illinois.

Competency-based education does not attempt to teach students everything there is to know but provides training about that which is truly needed. CBE is performance-oriented, asking participants to demonstrate the level at which they have acquired certain knowledge or skills. It is frequently offered on an open-entry/open-exit basis and operated with flex-time scheduling. Students can receive credit for prior knowledge or skills.

In order to use competency-based education, a training-ing agency must be able to identify the competencies required

for a specific job or career. Also these competencies must be defined in a form that is measurable. One big problem in establishing CBE is to delineate the competence areas and performance standards. Quite often, this is a difficult, time-consuming process, because the educators and employers involved may have difficulty agreeing. The positive side of this is that when the competencies and standards are once established, students and teachers can be held accountable for learning, and achievement can be measured in a manner which is useful to everyone involved.

Competency-based education programs are available at some community colleges and area vocational centers in Illinois. Those offering programs are listed with contact people and curriculum areas in the Project REA Competency-Based education report.

THE EMPLOYERS STUDY:
A MINI-VIEW OF WHAT EMPLOYERS THINK ABOUT CREDENTIALS

A small random sample of Illinois employers were sent questionnaires about their attitudes and behaviors regarding credentials for training. Their responses were extremely interesting. Two items were particularly noteworthy.

The employers indicated that 76 percent of positions require an applicant with either a high school diploma or GED as the first requirements before consideration for entry level. The implications of this for high school dropouts, or unemployed adults who did not complete high school, are profound. Not only does this information point out an obvious direction for employment and training programs but dramatically emphasizes the importance of credentials. Clearly a variety of programs that lead to high school graduation or GED certification are needed as a mainstay of any employment training program's goals.

Another question asked of the employers elicited the information that most of the employers in the survey would prefer to hire someone with a high school diploma over someone with a GED. This information adds a further dimension to youth programs, emphasizing the need for programs that will keep youth in high school until they have received a diploma. The information also lends support for the alternative school movement, which makes it possible for many youth who were unable to cope with the traditional school setting to receive a high school diploma.

The employers surveyed also indicated that both training and relevant job experience are valuable; however, they were more interested in hiring job applicants with actual experience in doing the job than those who had training with formal credentials but no experience. This finding offers strong support for those programs which include a work-experience or cooperative education component. In these programs, participants are getting actual experience doing the job as part of their training.

The Project REA employers survey was small and, therefore, cannot be said to be indicative of all Illinois employers, but it pointed up the fact that employers do have definite opinions regarding the qualifications needed to effectively fill entry-level jobs and the value of various credentials that can be used to verify the knowledge and skill-level of job applicants. Since the goal of the Job Training Partnership Act is to make the unemployed employable, the opinions and practices of employers are very important in making programmatic decisions. This initial study points the way to further study. A larger, more intense survey of Illinois employers would yield valuable information that could be used by employment training program agencies in planning for training and education that will equip participants to successfully compete for jobs.

The College of Lake County concluded on September 30, 1982 an eighteen-month study of various accrediting activities throughout Illinois which relate to the training of unemployed persons.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs showed tremendous foresight by funding this project, as not only an aid to CETA (Comprehensive Employment Act) program operators now, but as tools to transition from CETA to the new Jobs Training Partnership Act of 1982.

After reviewing the information in this summary, you may want more information on Project REA. The documents developed from this project are available from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, Employment Training Section, 320 West Washington Street, Fifth Floor, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

PROJECT REA BUDGET

10/1/81-9/30/82

	Amount Budgeted	Budget Expended
WAGES		
Project Director	$ 1,945.00	$ 1,945.00
Asst. Project Director	11,267.00	11,173.67
Project Secretary	5,373.00	5,002.28
FRINGE BENEFITS		
Project Director	234.00	
Asst. Project Director	1,359.00	2,063.81
Project Secretary	646.00	
DIRECT COSTS		
Council Meetings	1,000.00	352.13
Conference Expenses	1,200.00	940.91
Postage	2,480.00	2,479.62
Consumable Supplies	440.00	390.06
Printing	8,500.00	4,197.47
Telephone	500.00	499.92
Contractual Services	44,362.00	43,717.71
INDIRECT COSTS	8,285.00	8,284.92
TRAVEL	3,547.00	3,059.97
Total	$91,138.00	$84,059.97

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
8118 Math-Sciences Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

JUL 8 1983